

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03 TRSE-00
XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 AGRE-00 /088 W
-----010048 292257Z /65

P R 292138Z JUL 77

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2913

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

USSOUTHCOM

AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA

AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINS, PINT, ECON, CO

SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. SIX HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT WILL MEET IN BOGOTA AUGUST 5-7 TO DISCUSS CANAL NEGOTIATIONS AND COFFEE. BOTH CONSERVATIVE PARTY FACTIONS MOVED CLOSER TO AGREEING ON BELISARIO BETANCUR AS THEIR 1978 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. THE GOC PRESENTED ITS 1978 BUDGET TO CONGRESS, TERMING IT NEITHER INFLATIONARY NOR RESTRICTIVE. MINIMUM WAGE RATES WILL BE INCREASED AUTOMATICALLY. SECURITY FORCES WERE ACCUSED OF BRUTALITY IN THREE INCIDENTS. END SUMMARY.

2. SUMMIT MEETING IN BOGOTA. THE CHIEFS OF STATE OR GOVERNMENT OF COLOMBIA, COSTA RICA, JAMAICA, MEXICO, PANAMA AND VENEZUELA WILL MEET IN BOGOTA ON AUGUST 5-7 TO DISCUSS THE PANAMA CANAL NEGOTIATIONS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COFFEE SITUATION (BOGOTA 6990).

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3. CONSERVATIVE PARTY NEARS ACCORD ON BETANCUR. EX-PRESIDENT MISAEL PASTRANA, A LEADER OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY'S OSPINA-PASTRANA WING, AND BELISARIO BETANCUR, THE PARTY'S ONLY VISIBLE PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL, APPEAR TO HAVE BROUGHT THE PARTY'S SEARCH FOR A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE CLOSE TO RESOLUTION. PASTRANA, IN A RADIO INTERVIEW, INDICATED THAT HIS WING WOULD ACCEPT THE PARTY CONVENTION'S SELECTION OF A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, AND

THAT BETANCUR WAS AN ACCEPTABLE POSSIBILITY. BETANCUR MADE HIS ACCUSTOMED DENIAL THAT HE IS A CANDIDATE BUT ACCEPTED THE CONCEPT THAT THE CONVENTION WOULD MAKE THE SELECTION AND INDICATED THAT HE WOULD BE AVAILABLE. IN A SUBSEQUENT STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO PASTRANA'S LETTER OF EARLY JULY REQUESTING BETANCUR'S CLARIFICATION ON SEVERAL POLICY MATTERS WHICH DIVIDE THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY (BOGOTA 6339), BETANCUR TENDED TO FAVOR THE OSPINA-PASTRANA GROUP, BUT WAS CAREFUL NOT TO UPSET THE ALVARO GOMEZ FACTION. ON THE MAJOR ISSUES BETANCUR SUPPORTED THE NEED FOR A TWO-THIRDS VOTE BY CONGRESS TO SEPARATE THE 1978 PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS (A PRO-ALVARISTA VIEW), ARGUED AGAINST THE NEED TO ACTUALLY SEPARATE THESE ELECTIONS (A PRO-PASTRANA VIEW), AND STATED THAT A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT SIMPLY CONTINUE THE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES OF THE PRESENT LIBERAL ADMINISTRATION (A VIEW SHARED BY BOTH WINGS). HIS LETTER WAS WELCOMED BY BOTH FACTIONS OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY. IT SEEMS INCREASINGLY LIKELY THAT BETANCUR, THOUGH STILL UNWILLING TO PUBLICLY ANNOUNCE HIS INTENTION TO SEEK THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION, WILL BE SELECTED BY THIS PARTY'S CONVENTION AS THEIR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE.

4. GOC PRESENTS 1978 BUDGET. THE GOC PRESENTED ITS 1978 BUDGET TO CONGRESS THIS WEEK. ACCORDING TO THE BUDGET PROPOSAL, INVESTMENT EXPENDITURE WILL INCREASE BY 38.3 PCT AND OPERATING EXPENDITURES BY 9.6PCT AS COMPARED TO 1977. THE LARGEST INCREASES IN INVESTMENT WILL BE IN PUBLIC WORKS AND MINES AND ENERGY WHERE RAISES OF 89 PCT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND 184PCT WILL SHARPLY INCREASE INVESTMENTS IN IMPORTANT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS. THE MINISTER OF FINANCE CALLED THE BUDGET NEITHER INFLATIONARY NOR RESTRICTIVE, EMPHASIZING THAT CERTAIN KEY PROJECTS SUCH AS IN THE ENERGY FIELD MUST GO FORWARD.

5. MINIMUM WAGE LEVELS TO INCREASE. BEGINNING AUGUST 1 THE MINIMUM WAGE LEVEL WILL BE AUTOMATICALLY RAISED, BASED ON A DECREE OF LAST '76 31 WHICH INITIATED A THREE-STAGE INCREASE. IN THIS THIRD STEP THE NEW DAILY RATE FOR MAJOR CITIES WILL GO FROM 59 TO 62 PESOS, FOR SECONDARY CITIES FROM 55 TO 58 PESOS, AND FOR AGRICULTURAL WORKERS FROM 50 TO 53 PESOS. THE MINISTER OF LABOR ANNOUNCED THAT HE WILL SOON HOLD A MEETING OF THE NATIONAL SALARIES COUNCIL TO DISCUSS THE NEED FOR FURTHER INCREASES IN THIS WAGE RATE. UNIONS HAVE BEEN DEMANDING 50 PCT INCREASES IN ALL WAGE LEVELS TO MEET THE LOSS OF REAL WAGES CAUSED BY INFLATION.

6. PUBLIC ORDER: CHARGES AGAINST SECURITY FORCES. THE LEFTIST PRESS CONTINUED TO DENOUNCE ALLEGED EXCESSES BY SECURITY FORCES IN THEIR HANDLING OF PEASANTS LIVING IN AREAS WHERE GUERRILLAS AND/OR CRIMINAL ELEMENTS ARE ACTIVE. SUCH INCIDENTS THIS WEEK INCLUDED THE KILLING OF SIX MEN IN THE GUAJIRA REGION, AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THIRTY-TWO PEASANTS AND THE KILLING

OF FOUR OTHERS IN URABA (NORTHERN ANTIOQUIA). THOSE KILLED ATTEMPTED TO ESCAPE FROM A MILITARY PRISON AFTER BEING CAPTURED ON HIJACKING CHARGES. THE INCIDENT WAS CONFUSED BY CONFLICTING REPORTS IN WHICH THE MILITARY FIRST CLAIMED THE SIX WERE KILLED IN A FIRE FIGHT, AND THEN LATER REVISED THE STORY. THE MORE SERIOUS INCIDENT IN URABA WAS APPARENTLY RELATED TO A MILITARY ACTION AGAINST SUSPECTED SUPPORTERS OF THE SOVIET-LINE FARC GUERRILLAS, WHO HAVE BEEN VERY ACTIVE RECENTLY IN THAT ZONE. THE GOVERNOR OF THAT DEPARTMENT MET WITH LEFT WING POLITICIANS AND JOURNALISTS, AND ASSISTED IN THEIR INVESTIGATION OF THE CASE. NO OFFICIAL VERSION OF THE INCIDENT HAS YET BEEN MADE KNOWN. ELSEWHERE, A CONVENTION OF THE MAOIST FACTION OF ANUC (ANATIONAL PEASANT ORGANIZATION) IN ANTIOQUIA DEPARTMENT LED TO VIOLENCE WHEN TWON AUTHORITIES FIRST REFUSED PERMISSION FOR USE OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TWON SQUARE AS A MEETING PLACE, AND THEN CONFISCATED WEAPONS CARRIED BY ANUC MEMBERS AS THEY ATTEMPTED TO ASSEMBLE. A NUMBER OF POLICE AND CIVILIANS WERE INJURED IN THE ENSUING KLAHS. WHILE THERE ARE SPORADIC REPORTS OF EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE BY SECURITY FORCES IN REMOTE AREAS OF THE COUNTRY, AVAILABLE EVIDENCE INDICATES THAT SUCH INCIDENTS ARE NEITHER AUTHORIZED NOR CONDONED BY THE GOVERNMENT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BOGOTA07053
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Litigation History:
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Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
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Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1869309
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA
TAGS: PGOV, PINS, PINT, ECON, CO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/7238d76b-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009